critical digest

505 FIFTH AVENUE. N. Y. 17. N. Y.
MU 2-0326 Y. M. KRAUS

June 9,1954 Vol VI No 39 $10 year The Weekly New York City Theatre Newsletter

New York Theatre Diary

Of Mice and Men-Open Door 6/10/54. Comet Productions present an all Negro cast in John Steinbeck's drama, produced and directed by Luther James.Cast includes Howard Augusta, Yolanda Gaffne, Bill Gunn..Major Barbara-Greenwich Mews 6/16/54.Paul Vincent Gordon directs cast headed by Karen Morley, Irwin Gordon...Arabian Nights-Jones Beach 6/24/54. Musical extravaganza presented by Guy Lombardo. With Lauritz Melchior, Helena Scott,etc.

Current Theatre Reviews

Carousel- City Center 6/2/54. 100% raves. The limited engagement of the third and final production of the NYC Light Opera company has already been extended through June 20 and may be extended again. Except for the limitations imposed by the large stage and the large theatre, critics had very few complaints. William Hammerstein's production, Oliver Smith's scenery, John Boyt's costumes shared honors with cast headed by Jo Sullivan, Barbara Cook, Chris Robinson and John Conte. Rodgers and Hammerstein musical adaption of Molnar's Liliom was cheered by many reviewers as the pair's finest work. A beautiful and intelligent production in which all the parts are well done, summed up Atkinson,Times. A very good and well balanced company present the finest work of R & H ,rates Chapman,News. Youngsters in cast are destined, predicts Coleman,Mirror, to do big things on Broadway. Critic agreed with others who thought Barbara Cook almost stole the show in a minor role. Though Watts,Post, noted current revival is not as finished and artful as earlier presentations,it is well enough sung and pleasantly enough acted to make it clear once more how delightful show is. Hawkins,World Telegram & Sun, along with other reviewers, remarked that Bambi Lynn returning to her original role looked younger than ever. Sheaffer,Eagle, suggests show be moved to a regular Broadway theatre.

The Homeward Look-Theatre De Lys- 6/4/54-6/5/54.Except for some critical amazement as to how and/or why Vicki Cummings and Roddy McDowall got involved, the NYC daily critics were unanimous in panning the Effie Young-Ernest Pagano script was unfunny and unnecessary. Atkinson,Times, urged manager of house to bring back its former tenant, The Three Penny Opera. The last play of the season,in every sense of the word,summed up Kerr,Herald Tribune. A brave little audience got trapped along with the actors,reported Coleman,Mirror,who noted that even the air conditioning didn't work right. Play could be used as acid test for playgoers,suggests Watts,Post, for anyone who can sit through it and still retain his affection for the stage loves the theatre passionately. Script might be okay for a half hour TV show,comments Hawkins, WT&S. Many critics started looking homeward shortly after the curtain went up, quipped McClain, Journal American. Some rewriting might make it suitable summer stock fare,suggests Greenberg,Show Business. Play closed after second performance.

Hits Revisited

Sally Forrest is doing an acceptable job in the Vanessa Brown role in Seven Year Itch report Hobe,Variety and Sheaffer,Eagle. But Variety mugg noted that in some scenes she and Tom Ewell aren't entirely audible. Ewell continues to contribute one of the most expert and most enjoyable comedy performances in town,latter critic lauded.

Off Broadway

"Off Broadway League" has been formed to "provide employment ,experience and encouragement for its members" Group includes Club Theatre, Greenwich Mews Theatre, William Gass productions, Rachel Productions, Shakespeare Guild Festival Company, Swapping Song Fair, Trio Productions, and Provincetown Playhouse's Gilbert and Sullivan Company. Arthur Beckhard was elected executive director.

Luther James is the producer and director of a Negro company production of Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men which opens a limited engagement at Open Door Cabaret Theatre. Performances are Mon to Fri at 8 40 and Sat at 7 PM. It opens June 10. Cast includes Howard Augusta, Yolanda Gaffne, Bill Gunn and Clayton Smelts.

The Great Broxopp by A.A. Milne is being presented every Fri and Sat at Jan Hus House, 351 E 74 by Hunter and Hubern featuring Frances Reidy...The Homeward Look closed after 2 performances at Theatre de Lys(See Page 1 for reviews)... Walton Community Theatre closes its 7th season with Noel Coward's Present Laughter Fri and Sat June 11-12 at Reservior Ave and 196. St Bronx. Walton High School can be reached via IRT Jerome or IND-Con course subways to Kingsbridge Road.... Greenwich Mews re-opens June 16 with Major Barbara...Green Room Studio presents La Parisienne June 25.

No Tears for Tony,Harro Meller comedy at Provincetown Playhouse,was panned by Times and Women's Wear critics as unfunny, and except for Marina Fiory,poorly acted.

The Jackal, Sallie Howard and Evelyn Cornell's play presented by Skyline Theatre at Don Studios,125th St & Lenox Ave, was billed as minor playwriting by Variety mugg Gear. The story is diffuse and blurred.

Carmen, English operetta version by Virginia Card at the Paper Mill,NJ,Playhouse through June 22, is a chocolate soldierish version, rates Greenberg,Show Business. With few exceptions the cast is uninspired and mechanical.

Vaudeville

Juanita Hall, the "Bloody Mary" of South Pacfic, heads new Palace vaudeville show. Also featured are Steve Evans, Leonardo & Anita,Nils and Nadynne, Chet Clark, Yokoi Troupe, and Bud Carl.

Theatre Book Comments

"The Theatre in Our Times" by John Gassner(Crown) does not live up to its subtitle as "a survey of the men,materials and movements in the modern theatre," notes Down,Variety. Often the volume lacks clarification, and it skips many out of Manhatten theatre sources.Book also suffers from careless proofreading.

"Under the Milkwood", Dylan Thomas' "play for voices"(New Directions) is less a play then a vigorous poetic sketch reflecting life in a Welsh seacoast village,sums up Variety mugg.

Theatre Record Comments

The Pajama Game original cast album (Columbia) is a breezy,expertly arranged and spiritedly performed collection of second rate pieces,carbon copies of the several popular-song forms of the moment,reports Watt,News.

"CD" Gift Coupon

CRITICAL DIGEST-weekly digests NYC show-news,reviews,comments.Tickets,critics reports. Drama books,records,theatre on TV. SPECIAL SUMMER FEATURES. Perfect gift 52 weeks a year for "stage-struck." $10 year. $12.50 foreign. $1-5 weeks.

Send to.....
Address.....
Subscriber's Name.....

TUNE WNYC Morn Wain"Around NYC"Thur 8AM for "Off Broadway Round-up" by CD. Day after opening Tune WNBC Ben Grauer 7 30 AM for "CD" quotes of reviews.

Green Room Department

NEW TAX H.G...Show business has taken it on the chin again with the imposition of the 5% city tax on admission, comments Col[illegible]rror. Tax which was approved by NYC City Council and Board of Estimate begins July 1. Critic believes NYC fathers pulled a bonor in singling out show business. It will do a lot to help destroy an art and indestry that is one of NYC chief magnets for the all important tourist trade...Maybe if more politicians paid admissions, instead of asking for and getting free ducats, they might be more aware of what admission tax means to showmen and why the city has been so emotionally attacked by showmen, points out Variety Page 1 editorial.

SKULNIK PLANS...Conflicting stories of the future plans of Menasha Skulnik, The Fifth Season, are reported. Wilson, Post, predicts he will soon get a serious, dramatic role on Broadway, while Zolotow, Times, understands the Yiddish comedian is interested in next season's Ziegfeld's Follies.

BESTS & WORSTS...Ten best "new" plays of season picked by Watts, Post, include: Teahouse of August Moon, Caine Mutiny Court Martial, Ondine, Take a Giant Step, Tea and Sympathy, In the Summer House, Ladies of the Corridor, Madam, Will You Walk, Confidential Clerk and Trip to Bountiful...Sing Till Tomorrow wins prize by Nathan, Journal American, as the worst play of season. Worst dramatization of season award given by critic to Ouida Rathbone for Sherlock Holmes.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...The fear of becoming a hack has kept many a talented person from becoming a useful playwright, believes Kerr, Herald Tribune...If George Abbott, who knows more about show business than anybody else, can write he would be a great drama critic, lauds Chapman, News....Strong Are Lonely might have found an audience this season if it had been more shrewdly produced, suggests Watts, Post.

PRESS AGENT EMPLOYMENT...Times Drama Mailbag letter by William Fields, press representative for Ondine chiding letter writers who objected to Audrey Hepburn's performance was criticized by a Clinton, NY reader. Latter points out that since only a few dislike Miss Hepburn the press agent should be grateful. If more had filed objections, the press agent would have to look for another job.

INTERVIEW HI-LITE...For the first time on Broadway, Joan Fontaine would rather try-out herself, than try out a new play and herself, the new star of Tea and Sympathy told Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun. If everybody likes her, maybe next year or the year after she will try a new play.

Pros & Cons by T.M.K

Carousel is perfect. Many have been lobbying for years that this is the best of the Rodgers & Hammerstein musicals. The NYC Light Opera Company proves their point. Music and lyrics and book have warmth and meaning seldom seen on the musical stage. William Hammerstein as director, and Jo Sullivan, Chris Robinson and Barbara Cook in the leads, combine talents to present the most delightful musical production in years.

Theatre fans moaning over the 5% NYC admission tax can at least be thankful that the 5% payroll levy demanded by Equity for their Welfare Fund will not be added to the price of tickets. This may or may not be the time to ask exactly what the well-stocked bank account of the Equity Welfare Fund is used for. Everyone knows of the good work of Actors Fund, but the merits of the Equity Welfare Fund are a very well kept secret.

Actors Equity Association and the League of NY Theatres agreed to a new three year contract. The strike threat which might have closed one hit per night was thus averted. The new contract calls for a $10 weekly pay increase for principals and chorus members on the road, a $10 increase in rehearsal money, and a $5 increase for chorus members in New York. Though the demanded 5% welfare payroll tax was not granted, the managers will give extended medical and hospitalization insurance.

Plays

The Girl in Pink Tights closes June 12...The Fifth Season closes down for "vacation" June 26 and is scheduled to re-open August 22 with new players in roles now portrayed by Menasha Skulnick and Richard Whorf...The Rainmaker, N. Richard Nash's comedy with Geraldine Page, opens in NY Oct 28...Victor Borge's Comedy in Music will be on "vacation" from July 3 to Aug 2.

People

72 took the three day examination to qualify as union members of Local 829 of United Scenic Artists of America held at the Metropolitan Opera House...Virginia Copeland has succeeded Priscilla Gillette in The Golden Apple...David Kurlan has taken over Norman Rose's role in The Fifth Season...Abe Burrows will direct Harold Kurnitz comedy Reclining Nude due in NY week of Sept 27...Daniella Boni, 11 year old Italian film actress, makes Broadway debut in All Summer Long...Shirley McLaine continues as sub for ill Carol Haney, The Pajama Game...Jenny Workman is doing the dancing while Jeanmaire handles the acting-singing parts of her role in Girl in Pink Tights...Mae Barnes, By the Beautiful Sea, doubles at Ben Soir.

Other Broadways

"Sir Thomas More", a play in which scholars claim Shakespeare aided, will be presented in London this week by Donald Wolfit...Hamlet is being presented in Moscow as the tragedy of a man of humanist principles who perceives the depravity of the feudal life surrounding him and also perceives that he cannot change it, Times reports.

Theatre Record Notes

Arabian Nights album made by Guy Lombardo's orchestra. Decca LP will be on sale June 24, opening night of the Jones Beach, LI, outdoor musical...Columbia recorded an original cast album of The Pajama Game...James Mason will make a Decca LP album of dramatic readings.

Theatre TV & Radio Notes

Ondine will be adapted for CBS Radio "Let's Pretend" June 19..."Angels Auditions" switches to WATV, Jersey City, on Wednesdays...NBC TV Leland Hayward shows to feature musical version of Peter Pan, The Innocents, Tonight at 8 30.

CRITICAL DIGEST
505-Fifth Ave, NYC

First Class Mail